

## Mark 4 Chapter Study

### INTRODUCTION

So far Mark has shown us Jesus authority and power, but only in a rather general way.

He's told us Jesus taught with authority, but he's not really given us an example.

He's told us Jesus healed the multitude, but so far he's only given a few examples.

In chs. 4 & 5, Mark gives us examples of both Jesus teaching and miracles.

### **Outline for Mark**

So far we've covered -

#### **I. JESUS IN GALILEE CHS. 1-9**

##### **A. Jesus' Ministry Begins Ch. 1**

##### **B. Jesus' Ministry Upsets the Authorities Chs. 2-3**

Tonight we begin with

##### **C. Examples of Jesus' Teaching Ch. 4:1-34**

###### **1. The parable of the sower 4:1-20**

###### **a. vs. 1-9 The parable given**

**<sup>1</sup> And again He began to teach by the sea. And a great multitude was gathered to Him, so that He got into a boat and sat *in it* on the sea; and the whole multitude was on the land facing the sea.**

Jesus is still in Galilee and as we learn in Ch. 3, His fame has spread far and wide.

People are coming from as far away as a hundred miles, a journey of nearly a week by foot.

While Jesus' fame is growing great among the common people, as we saw Sunday, the authorities had grown gravely concerned, hoping Jesus would not turn out to be just one more of a long line of trouble-makers that had prompted the Romans to take an even harsher line with the Jews.

So they tried to discredit Jesus with tough questions and challenges to some of the things He was doing that offended their traditions.

Every one of these challenges backfired badly, making them look foolish and Jesus even more amazing.

As we read here in v. 1, the crowd has grown so large they're literally pressing into Jesus and He has to climb into a boat and push off away from the shore.

Jesus had asked for this very arrangement in 3:9 . . .

**So He told His disciples that a small boat should be kept ready for Him because of the multitude, lest they should crush Him.**

Get the picture; Jesus is in the boat, the crowd is at the water's edge.

If you've ever been at a lake when the water is calm, you know that the surface of a lake acts as a great sound reflector.

There are potentially thousands of people in this crowd, yet in the right conditions, as Jesus stood in that boat and talked back toward the

multitude, He could have been fairly easily heard by them all.

**2 Then He taught them many things -- by parables, and said to them in His teaching: <sup>3</sup> “Listen! Behold, [Look!]**

Jesus begins with words which speak to the senses.

He arrests their attention with –“Listen!” Then He adds “Look!”

He doesn’t mean their physical eyes but the eyes of their hearts.

He wants them to be *active listeners*, seeking to understand what He’s saying.

He’s about to tell them a story and He wants them to be fully engaged, listening diligently & picturing the story with their imagination.

Why all of this is important is the very purpose of this first parable.

**<sup>3</sup> “Listen! Behold, a sower went out to sow. <sup>4</sup> And it happened, as he sowed, *that some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds of the air came and devoured it.***

Got it – See it? A sower is sowing seed in a field.

As he scatters the seed, some of it falls on the footpath that borders the field.

These were trails & roads that skirted the border of nearly every field.

They’d been beaten rock hard by the passage of thousands and thousands of feet for generations.

No sooner did the seed fall on these footpaths than birds flew down and snatched them up.

**<sup>5</sup> Some fell on stony ground, where it did not have much earth; and immediately it sprang up because it had no depth of earth. <sup>6</sup> But when the sun was up it was scorched, and because it had no root it withered away.**

The soil of Galilee is rich and excellent for growing crops.

But there’s one problem with the ground – it’s filled with rocks.

Before a field can be used for crops, much work has to be invested in it to make it profitable.

After clearing the trees, it has to be gone through by many hands, pulling out the rocks. These are then used in making fences along one of the borders of the field.

But the process of time & erosion sees more rocks work their way to the surface and every few years the field needs to be cleaned again.

As the sower makes his way through the field scattering seed, some of it falls on soil which has no depth; it’s just a thin covering over a rocky patch.

As the seed sprouts, the roots go down only a short distance and hit rock.

They stop and the energy of the plant is re-directed into the stalk and branches and leaves.

But on the first hot day, as the sun is beating down on the plant, it burns and withers because it had no root; nothing to supply the visible growth with water and food.

**<sup>7</sup> And some seed fell among thorns; and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no crop.**

In any field, there are some seeds not planted by the sower. They’re weeds – and

no matter how much you work the soil, it seems the weeds will always be there.

I've noticed that weeds will sometimes tend to pop up in a specific area.

There's one spot in my front yard I've had a difficult time getting the chickweed out of; it's just one area right in the middle of the lawn!

Jesus said that as the sower scattered seed, some of it fell into soil containing thornbush-seeds.

Everyone in Galilee knew about thornbushes; they were weeds which grew in every untended field.

They were so hardy and determined they blocked the sunlight and stole the water and food from other plants.

**8 But other seed fell on good ground and yielded a crop that sprang up, increased and produced: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred."**

Some of the seed the sower scattered fell on soil that had been well prepared.

It sprouted and grew to produce a crop; in some places, 30 to 1, in other places 60 to 1, and in the best soil, 100 to 1.

**9 And He said to them, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"**

This was Jesus' way of calling them to look beyond the simple story to its deeper meaning.

And in His words here in v. 9, we're given a vital clue about *understanding* parables.

Because they were stories Jesus *told* and the people *heard*, that's the way we need to approach them – not as words to look at and read and then parse to the finest detail, making every word and phrase mean something deeply spiritual.

The parables are not *allegories* in which everything has a symbolic meaning.

They were stories Jesus told, in a specific setting and for a specific reason to communicate a specific lesson.

They always arose out of a context and such is the case here.

The crowd had come mostly because of the miracles and healings Jesus performed.

Jesus wanted to keep the focus on His *message*, His teaching.

He told this parable of the sower to challenge the multitude with their motives in seeking Him.

After listening to Him each person there would be challenged to consider which kind of soil they were.

**b. vs. 10-12 The reason for parables**

**10 But when He was alone, those around Him with the twelve asked Him about the parable.**

Mark breaks from the narrative of Jesus telling parables by the lakeside to add this about the disciples coming to Jesus later and asking Him to explain the parable of the sower.

**11 And He said to them, "To you it has been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God; but to those who are outside, all things come in parables, <sup>12</sup> so that 'Seeing they may see and not**

**perceive, And hearing they may hear and not understand; Lest they should turn, And their sins be forgiven them.”**

What Jesus says here is something we could literally spend the whole night on. Let me try to be brief. In the Bible, a *mystery* is a truth which has been hidden and cannot be known by man through his own investigation or ingenuity.

It's a truth which can only be known by the direct action of the Spirit of Truth. An example of a mystery is the Church.

In the OT, there wasn't a single hint that one day God would open wide the doors of salvation to all people *regardless* of their national origin.

Salvation came through the Covenant God made with Abraham, so if a Gentile wanted to be saved, he/she had to become a Jew.

It took the cross, the resurrection, and the ascension of Christ into heaven, permitting the descent of the Holy Spirit into the hearts of *all those who are born again* to make a new humanity that comprises the Church in which now there is no such thing as Jew or Gentile.

But these things were *hidden* from those who lived *before* Christ.

Jesus is telling the disciples that because of their unique calling as His official followers, things will be revealed to them the crowds will not hear.

While the crowds will be taught only with parables, when Jesus speaks to them alone, He will speak openly and clearly.

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Now, 2 things to see here . . .

1) This ought to speak volumes to us about the importance of spending intimate time with the Lord.

The Lord speaks plainly to His followers, to those who come close to Him. Indeed, the whole idea of intimacy is based on communication, sharing, and the personal knowledge that flows from it.

If the extent of the time you spend with the Lord is what you get when you go to church or Bible study, then really, you're not much different from the crowd that stood on the shore that day and heard Jesus speak in parables.

If you want the goods, if you want the rich treasures of God, then spend some quiet, private time with Him.

Just sit down with your Bible, and with a prayerful heart – Listen! Look!

2) Jesus used *parables* with the crowds. But His reason for doing so is troubling.

**11 And He said to them, “To you it has been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God; but to those who are outside, all things come in parables, <sup>12</sup> so that ‘Seeing they may see and not perceive, And hearing they may hear and not understand; Lest they should turn, And their sins be forgiven them.’”**

This makes it look as though Jesus was purposefully *hiding* things from the multitudes.

In fact, this sounds like He *wanted them* to be left *unforgiven!*

But that can't be – after all, He came to die for the sins of the whole world, as it says in 1 John 2:2.

So what's going on here? Jesus is quoting from Isaiah 6.

In that passage, God told Isaiah to speak His words to the people at a crucial time in the history of Israel.

They stood on a knife edge of decision; either they would ignore his call to repentance and fall into national judgment, or they would repent and be delivered.

Isaiah's message would serve one of two purposes;

1) *to those who were truly seeking God*, they would hear it as the Word of God and repent. – Or—

2) *the word would provoke their rebellious hearts* to even more rebellion and so judgment.

It's the whole analogy of the same sun that *softens* wax, *hardens* clay. If Isaiah's day was a critical moment in the history of Israel, then Jesus' day was the most critical – for the nation's decision about Him would determine her fate.

As we saw in our study last week in chs. 2 & 3, the authorities have set themselves in opposition to Jesus.

Matthew tells us that even some among the common people were at this point beginning to back away from Jesus.

So Jesus switched from straight-forward teaching to parables because of this shift in the way people were *responding* to Him.

To those who are genuine seekers after God and His truth, the parables He tells will *illustrate* that truth and show them the path to Life.

But for those who are hardening *against* Him the parables will *obscure* the truth, and their reaction to the stories He tells will only *affirm and reveal the hardness of their hearts*.

When Jesus says at the end of v. 12

**Lest they should turn, And their sins be forgiven them."**

He's speaking of those who are rejecting Him.

And what He means is that because of Who He is The Son of God, The *Word* of God itself, if He were to use straight reason and logic with His opponents, His Words could actually *FORCE* them into acquiescence, and God will never do that to convert someone.

In other words, Jesus would not *argue* anyone into faith.

He could have, but it would have been a form of force that is not the means or way of God.

Remember, He doesn't *take* choice from us, He *empowers* it.

Jesus came to forgive sins – but they must be sins a person *WANTS* forgiven.

God doesn't force anyone into forgiveness.

### c. vs. 13-20 The parable explained

**13 And He said to them, "Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables?"**

This parable of the sower is the *key* for understanding *each* of the parables.

But remember, a parable was meant to teach *one main lesson*, one big idea.

Jesus is going to explain what the various parts of the parable refer to in a spiritual sense, but don't let that obscure the story's bottom line.

**14 The sower sows the word.**

So the seed in the parable is the Word of God.

Who would that make the sower? In this case, Jesus, but really, anyone who spreads the word of God.

**15 And these are the ones by the wayside where the word is sown. When they hear, Satan comes immediately and takes away the word that was sown in their hearts.**

In the parable, it was *birds* that snatched up the seed – so the birds represent the devil.

The seed was sown on soil, but here the word is sown where? In *hearts*.

This seed fell on soil that was beaten hard by the world. It never took root but was forgotten as quickly as it was heard

**16 These likewise are the ones sown on stony ground who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with gladness; <sup>17</sup> and they have no root in themselves, and so endure only for a time. Afterward, when tribulation or persecution arises for the word's sake, immediately they stumble.**

The shallow rocky soil speaks of people who have a quick, initial excitement at the Word of God, but never develop any spiritual depth.

When trials come, and especially challenges to their faith – since there's no real spiritual strength, there's nothing to sustain them and they fall way.

**18 Now these are the ones sown among thorns; *they are the ones who hear the word,* <sup>19</sup> and the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.**

The thorns represent the cares & love of this world which rise up to squeeze out the Word that's been sown in a person's heart.

**20 But these are the ones sown on good ground, those who hear the word, accept *it*, and bear fruit: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred."**

The seed sown on good soil is the word of God that's actively received by the one who hears it.

It produces spiritual fruit; in some at one rate, in others at different rates.

It isn't the *rate* of yield that's so important as the fact that there *IS* a return, a result; there must be fruit from the spiritual seed sown.

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What's the bottom line of this parable? What lesson is it seeking to impart?

Think about its context. Where did Jesus say it? What's the setting?

He's standing in a boat just offshore because the crowd has gotten too pushy in their desire to get to Him to see the miraculous.

He challenges them with their motive for being there! Why are they there?

The whole time they've He's been with them He's been proclaiming the Word of God to them!

What difference, if any, is it making in their lives?

Are they different today because of what He said yesterday and the day before?

Is there any real change in their lives for the time they've been trying to get to Him?

Most of the Pharisees were like the wayside – their hearts were hard. As soon as Jesus spoke, because they had set themselves to oppose Jesus, as soon as He spoke the devil came and snatched away the words.

If you had asked them the next day what Jesus had taught on, they wouldn't have remembered or cared.

Many more of the people heard Jesus and got all excited at the authority with which He spoke – they were amazed at the seeming novelty with which He taught.

And they were all abuzz about what He said.

But because they never really took the time to see how what Jesus was saying spoke to them personally, about what God was looking for in them, as soon as someone challenged them on it, they threw up their hands and said they didn't really know

For them, Jesus ended up becoming little more than a fad, another passing fancy, an exciting event to occupy their attention and entertain them for a few months.

Some of the people heard Jesus and realized His words spoke to something deep within them.

They heard and decided to give attention to what He said – kind of like test driving a new philosophy, a new way of thinking.

And as reasonable and appealing as God's Word from Christ's lips was, when it came right down to it, when that Truth came into conflict with their desires for the things of this world, the world won out.

But there were some there who heard in Jesus the Voice of heaven.

They understood His Words were life. They heard them gladly and sought to live them out faithfully.

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The challenge to the crowd there that day was to consider *HOW* they were listening to Jesus.

Did they consider their hearts as they listened?

Did they realize that they weren't judging His words – His words were judging them and that judgment came by what effect the Word had on them.

Friend – how's your heart tonight?

Is it *hard* because it's been a footpath for the world?

Do you give so much attention to the world, to its values, ideas, & ways that your heart is like a highway the world travels along 24 hours a day?

I know that there are lots of people who come in here and sit among us who physically hear the word, but never let it into their hearts.

Their body is here but their minds are somewhere else; at the club, at work, at home watching the tube, off in some dark corner doing who knows what.

How's your heart tonight?

Is it *shallow*? Do you come and listen and say, "Jesus is cool! I like Jesus; He's an amazing guy! And wow, I didn't know this old book could be so relevant and interesting."

You get emotional while you're hear and think, "This is great."

But as soon as you walk out the door, and the trails of daily life return, you look at Church, and Bible study, and that whole Jesus thing as just a diversion, like going to the movie, only more wholesome?

Friend – how’s your heart tonight?

Is it *strangled*? Do you recognize the truth of God’s Word and vainly wish you could be a stronger believer, but when it comes right down to it, whenever it’s a choice between the world and God, the world wins and the Word goes out the window?

The good soil that produced a harvest was soil that had been prepared.

It had been broken up, cleared of stones, cultivated, weeded, watered, and fed.

When Jesus ends the parable with the words in v. 9 –

**“He who has ears to hear, let him hear!”**

He means precisely that we cannot be *passive hearers* with the Word of God.

We must be *active hearers* – one’s who prepare their hearts by repenting of sin and renouncing the things that would oppose and choke out the Word.

## **2. The parable of light 4:21**

Mark now returns to the narrative of Jesus speaking to the crowd on the shore.

In vs. 21-25, Mark gives a rapid-fire burst of some of Jesus’ sayings.

The way they’re given here it seems they all go together, but comparing Mark’s to Matthew’s gospel shows these things were all said as single lessons.

**21 Also He said to them, “Is a lamp brought to be put under a basket or under a bed? Is it not to be set on a lampstand?”**

No one lights a lamp and then puts it in hiding.

It’s put in the place where it can light the most area.

It’s light’s very nature to expose, illuminate, reveal.

What’s true of light is true of *truth*.

God sent the Son into the world to bear witness of the truth and He was not going to allow Him to be denied or hidden away by His opponents.

## **3. All things will be revealed 4:22-23**

**22 For there is nothing hidden which will not be revealed, nor has anything been kept secret but that it should come to light. 23 If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.”**

God is the great searcher of men’s hearts and in his final judgment, all motives and secrets will be revealed.

All that is except those of the saints. For what God forgives in Christ, He forgets.

## **4. The necessity of following through 4:24**

**24 Then He said to them, “Take heed what you hear. With the same measure you use, it will be measured to you; and to you who hear, more will be given.”**

Jesus pulls an illustration from the marketplace here.

Many of the goods sold in the stalls of the market were weighed out by a set of

scales.

Some merchants had three sets of weights; one lighter when selling, one heavier when buying, and one accurate set when being investigated. Jesus is saying, the standard we use in dealing with others will be the one used on us.

And if we are diligent in attending to the Lord, we'll find that He opens His words to us in increasing measure.

## 5. Having & Losing 4:25

**25 For whoever has, to him more will be given; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him."**

Those who receive truth in the Person and teaching of Jesus, and *act* on it, will receive more.

But those who *reject* that truth will ultimately lose what little sense of what is right and true they *do* have.

## 6. The parable of the seed-growth 4:26-29

**26 And He said, "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground, <sup>27</sup> and should sleep by night and rise by day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he himself does not know how. <sup>28</sup> For the earth yields crops by itself: first the blade, then the head, after that the full grain in the head. <sup>29</sup> But when the grain ripens, immediately he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come."**

[Sunday]

## 7. The parable of the mustard seed 4:30-32

**30 Then He said, "To what shall we liken the kingdom of God? Or with what parable shall we picture it? <sup>31</sup> It is like a mustard seed which, when it is sown on the ground, is smaller than all the seeds on earth; <sup>32</sup> but when it is sown, it grows up and becomes greater than all herbs, and shoots out large branches, so that the birds of the air may nest under its shade."**

The mustard seed is *not* the smallest of all the seeds; it wasn't then & isn't now, & Jesus knew it.

What He refers to here is a mustard seed which is itself tiny compared to *other* mustard seeds.

The word "tiny" carried the connotation of something which was *insignificant*, and that's the point – this seed has nothing within it which would cause the world to give it any attention; it's a thing *despised*.

But it's planted, and ends up growing into this massive tree that towers above all other plants.

Again, this isn't the normal nature of the mustard plant, which is normally just a shrub and no tree at all.

So Jesus tells a story about a seed which begins as something the world considers *nothing*, and it grows into something so big it can't be missed.

If the world likes *big*, then this tree is *adored* – and perching in its branches

are birds who make their home there.

Now, in the parable of the sower, what did birds represent? The devil. This parable is meant to illustrate that the earthly manifestation of the Kingdom of God will begin as something the world despises, but over time, it will grow into something it was never meant or designed to be, and it will end up being the habitation of evil.

A perfect review of Church history from the death and burial of Christ right up through the End Times Apostate Church.

#### **8. Jesus taught the multitudes only in parables 4:33-34**

**33 And with many such parables He spoke the word to them as they were able to hear it. 34 But without a parable He did not speak to them. And when they were alone, He explained all things to His disciples.**

#### ***D. Examples of Jesus' Power Ch. 4:35-5:43***

Now Mark is going to give us 3 examples of Jesus' power.

First we have an example of His power of nature.

Second, His power over the spiritual realm.

Third, His power over death.

#### **1. Jesus' power over physical realm 4:35-41**

**35 On the same day, when evening had come, He said to them, "Let us cross over to the other side."**

It's been a long day of controversy with the scribes from Jerusalem, with His own family who'd come and tried to convince Him to return with them to Nazareth.

The crowd's been pressing Him hard all day and so after a lengthy time of teaching them Jesus knows He needs rest/

He's not going to get it in Capernaum where all the crowds are, so he tells the disciples to take Him to the other side of the lake.

**36 Now when they had left the multitude, they took Him along in the boat as He was. And other little boats were also with Him.**

The other boats might be some of the crowd who strung along, or they may have carried the rest of the disciples.

These boats weren't that big and 13 guys in one would have been pushing it badly, so the other boats were most likely just the other disciples.

Remember that Peter, Andrew, James and John had all been commercial fishermen and had boats docked there at Capernaum.

**37 And a great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that it was already filling.**

Galilee lies about 630 ft. below sea level and is hemmed in by a circle of hills cut by deep ravines.

During the early evening, as the surrounding elevations are cooling off, the hot air in the lake depression continues to rise.

This creates a vacuum over the lake that the cooler air from the heights rushes in to fill.

Within a matter of minutes the Galilee can go from placid and serene to a

raging torrent. And that's what happened here.

The waves were so tall they were continually rolling over the sides of the boat.

**38 But He was in the stern, asleep on a pillow. And they awoke Him and said to Him, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?"**

Jesus was exhausted from the day's labors, and even though the situation appeared desperate, Jesus was sound asleep in the back of the boat.

They waited till the boat was in danger of sinking, then they frantically woke Him and cried out a word of accusation toward Him – "Don't you care that we're gonna' die?!?!?"

**39 Then He arose and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace, be still!" And the wind ceased and there was a great calm.**

Marks makes it clear, the change was *immediate!*

Even more suddenly that the storm came up, it ended.

**40 But He said to them,**

Again, the way Mark writes makes it clear that as soon as Jesus spoke to the sea,

He turned to the disciples and spoke to them -

**"Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?"**

Faith and fear are mutually exclusive.

Jesus poses them a simple question – how is it that they lack the faith that would conquer their fear in the midst of the storm?

Was a fear of dying in that storm a reasonable fear?

The answer is, in that moment, with Jesus there in their boat – no.

The trip had begun with Jesus telling them to take Him across the lake; that implies they'll make it to the other side.

Also, He'd given them more than abundant evidence He was the Messiah, and it wasn't likely The Father was going to let the Messiah's mission be lost to an accidental drowning.

**41 And they feared exceedingly, and said to one another, "Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him!"**

If they'd been afraid of dying in the storm, the calm that came at Jesus' command terrified them even more!

To me, this is one of both the funniest and comforting stories in the Bible.

I can't help but find the reaction of the disciples to Jesus after He calmed the storm hilarious!

I mean, it's so classic – He rebukes their fear by saying they ought to believe in Him, and that that faith would preserve them.

But then they become even more terrified *AT* Him when He reveals His power over nature.

Their reaction ought to have been – not terror, but the utmost confidence & peace.

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Just as Jesus told the disciples to take Him across the lake, He tells us to take Him with us as we live our daily lives. Each day is one more lake we are called to cross.

And just as they ran into a squall, a storm that threatened their lives, so we'll run into all kinds of storms and trials in this life.

God never promised us smooth sailing.

Being a Christian is not the guarantee of a trouble free life – on the contrary,  
Jesus said that in this life we'd have tribulation.

But He said we could be joyous in the midst of those trials, confident that His  
victory over sin and death would be ours as well!

The fact of the matter is folks, if that storm hadn't come down on them that night  
they would have missed out on the greater revelation of Jesus as Lord of  
Nature.

You and I can only experience Jesus as the Lord of our circumstances when  
those circumstances rise against us and He comes to rescue us.

We can only discover Him to be the Faithful Friend when we need Him to  
come through for us.

So He'll let the storms come, the trials happen – all so that we can come out  
the other side with a greater faith in Him as a loving, faithful God.